

HOUSE RESOLUTION 11

By Yokley

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of John "Toot" Phillips of
Cocke County.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of John Phillips of Cosby, an American patriot and a true hero of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, a modest and gracious gentlemen throughout his lifetime, John "Toot" Phillips proudly served this nation with the utmost courage and dedication, displaying his bravery and valor on the field of battle where he rightfully earned the thanks of a grateful nation; and

WHEREAS, born near Tobe's Creek in the rugged mountain area near Cosby in Cocke County, John Phillips was the sixth of ten children born to Walter and Mae Shults Phillips; and

WHEREAS, as a child John Phillips relocated with his family from the Groundhog community of Upper Cosby to Maryville, where his father joined the police force; and

WHEREAS, in 1945, at the age of sixteen, John "Toot" Phillips lied about his age and enlisted in the United States Army, traveling to Knoxville where the recruiters denied his enlistment until he obtained the permission of one parent; and

WHEREAS, exhibiting the tenacity and strong sense of duty that runs deep within the Phillips family, John "Toot" Phillips convinced his father to grant permission; the Army later discovered his true age, but by that time he had passed his seventeenth birthday and was allowed to remain in the service; and

WHEREAS, serving an 18-month enlistment, he first completed basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, before shipping out to Fort Lewis, Washington, where he served the rest of his tour of duty; and

WHEREAS, after working at American Enka for six months, Toot Phillips re-enlisted in the armed forces along with his older brother, Buster, who had previously served as well, seeing duty as an infantryman in Germany during World War II; and

WHEREAS, signed on for a three-year tour of duty, Mr. Phillips was sent to basic training for a second time and would later credit it with saving his life; and

WHEREAS, ordered to report to duty in Seattle, Washington, Toot Phillips was then shipped overseas to northern Japan and stationed in Hachinoi where the temperatures could drop well below zero; and

WHEREAS, one week shy of completing his commitment, Sergeant Phillips and his squad were immediately deployed to Korea as the conflict broke, leading the beach-landing under the direct command of General Douglas McArthur and encountering intense gunfire from Korean troops during the initial five-day action before cutting off the enemy forces; and

WHEREAS, ordered by General McArthur to march to Seoul and the Thirty-Eighth Parallel, Sergeant Phillips and his fellow soldiers spent the next nine months in combat, trading hills with the Communist forces until that fateful day when he and his fellow soldiers attempted to take Chosen Reservoir; and

WHEREAS, unbeknown to the Americans, thousands of Chinese troops lay in wait at the site alongside Korean forces. Sergeant Phillips and his fellow soldiers were surrounded but continued to fight and kill the enemy until they ran out of ammunition; and

WHEREAS, on that day, December 1, 1950, at the age of twenty-two, Sergeant John Phillips was captured along with thirty-six other soldiers. He would remain a prisoner of war for nearly three years; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Phillips was the only man in his group who could walk, despite having been shot eight times during the battle, and became responsible for burying his fellow soldiers who died in captivity. As he buried the soldiers he managed to save their dog tags and later turned these over to his commander after his release so that their families could be notified; and

WHEREAS, having initially been notified that he had been killed in action, Sergeant Phillips's family learned eighteen months later that he was being held as a prisoner of war; their first letter from him arrived in January of 1952; and

WHEREAS, held in the first prison camp for six months, John Phillips was moved to a much larger prison camp closer to China where he would spend the next fourteen months, escaping with two other soldiers for a nine-day period; and

WHEREAS, re-captured due to the lack of a compass, Sgt. Phillips and his fellow soldiers were confined to "rabbit cages" - mud hut constructions that restricted all movement - for thirty days and tried before a Chinese general who sentenced him to a year of hard labor; and

WHEREAS, never losing his humanity, Toot Phillips rescued an elderly Korean woman from drowning in a river while he was performing forced manual labor along the water's edge, diving into the river and pulling her to safety. His heroism would result in the commutation of his sentence, and he was allowed to return to the prison camp; and

WHEREAS, on September 1, 1953, John Phillips was released in a prisoner exchange, having survived his initial wounds, friendly fire by American pilots who didn't know they were strafing a prison camp, and years of horrendous mental and physical abuse from his captors as well as the bombing of the train that was to send him, along with his fellow prisoners, to the salt mines in Siberia; and

WHEREAS, for his courageous military service, Sergeant John Phillips was awarded two Prisoner of War medals, a combat badge with the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, and honors denoting his service in Japan, Korea, and North Korea; and

WHEREAS, after medical care, paperwork, and travel logistics, John "Toot" Phillips returned to Maryville and his loving family. At a tremendous family reunion just two weeks later, he encountered beautiful 18-year-old Carrie Sutton who had written him during his time overseas. The young couple wed on October 24, 1953, and enjoyed more than fifty-five wonderful years together; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Phillips is survived by his beloved wife, Carrie Sutton Phillips, and their nine children, John "Dugan" Phillips, Jr., Diane Phillips Gregg, Carol Phillips Williamson, Debbie Phillips Ford, Susie Phillips Clark, James Phillips, Randy Phillips, Ben Phillips, and Ginger Phillips, along with fourteen grandchildren and six great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, John Phillips leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the remarkable life of such a distinguished soldier, public servant, and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we honor the memory of John "Toot" Phillips and pay respectful tribute to his impeccable character, indomitable courage, and steadfast commitment to his country, his State, and his fellow man.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Phillips.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.